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RESEARCH

FILE No. RR 6/5 (Part)

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THE REGIONAL COMMAND OF THE IRAQI BA'ATH
JULY 1968 - JULY 1969

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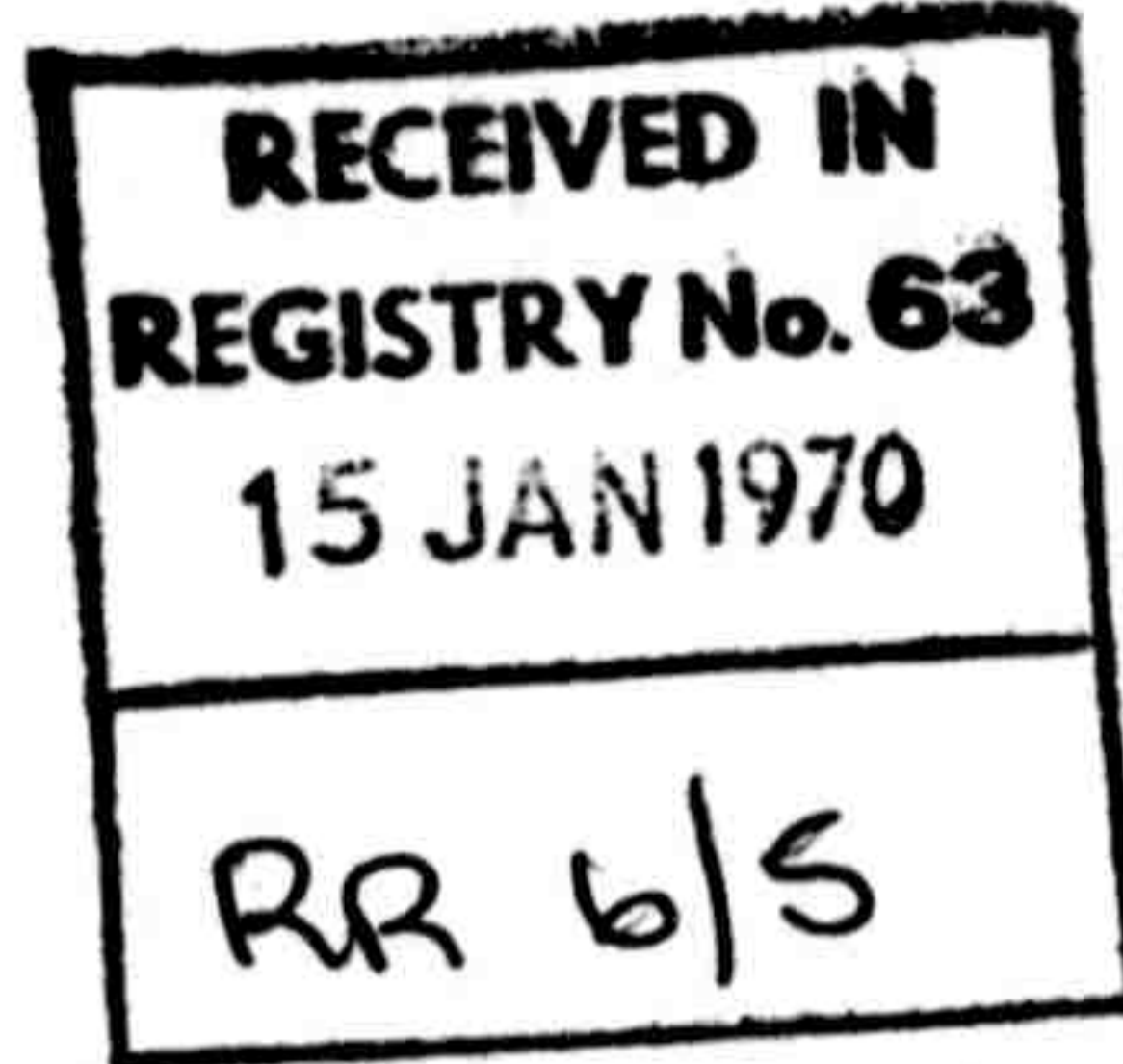
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BRITISH EMBASSY

BAGHDAD



7 January 1970

New Department,

I am now writing to give ~~our~~ detailed comments on the draft memorandum on the Ba'ath Party which you sent with your letter RR6/18 of 13 August. ④

7 Jan. We have been writing much for comment
2. The draft memorandum seems to us to be out of date in that it reflects to a certain extent the situation in the early stages after the Ba'ath's return to power, and this has not been helped by the delay at this end in commenting on it. The political situation here has undoubtedly developed considerably since last year and even within the last few months. Therefore some of the comments contained in this letter are necessary consequences of this development.

3. The first and most general comment we have is that the title of the paper would seem more appropriately to be "The Iraqi Ba'ath" rather than the longer version you yourself suggest. Because of the development in the political situation here the paper as it now stands seems to us to overlook the following important points:

✓ (a) that when the Right Wing Ba'ath came to power in July 1968 they were for the reasons the paper rightly states in an extremely weak position, and had like every other new Iraqi régime since 1958, to resort to brutal methods to establish themselves.

(b) they now seem much more confident and stronger, and will be difficult to dislodge from outside. They realise that the most likely reason for their overthrow would be an internal split and that their overthrow would be (literally) fatal for them; and this awareness could well keep them united for some time to come;

(c) now that they feel well-established they are beginning to implement with some determination and more publicity the detailed party programme which they drew up last autumn and particularly at the Congress of the Iraqi Party held last December;

(d) they have drawn closer to the Communist countries, hoping to derive from this certain material benefits. However they have not radically altered their views either of the Soviet Union or of the Iraqi Communist Party since 1963, and are aware that the Communists aim to gobble them up in the last resort. They do not intend to be drawn so far into the Communist camp as to be unable to avoid this fate;

/ (e)

Research Department,
F.C.O.,
London S.W.1.

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✓ (e) the noisy rôle they are playing ⁱⁿ the Palestinian affairs, particularly in the establishment of the Arab Liberation Front, is an attempt to assert Iraq's leadership of the "progressive" Arab countries and in no way conflicts with the fact that they are less pro-Nasser than their predecessors;

✓ (f) they are conducting an aggressive foreign policy in the Arab World both on the government and on the party level, and they clearly attach great importance to the spreading of Ba'athist ideology as a means of extending Iraqi influence in the Arab world. They seem already to have had some success in building up party infra-structures in most Arab countries including the Gulf. They seem undeterred by the contradictions which can arise between the development of government relations and the subversive activity by Ba'athist cells in other countries and the fact that their dual policy has won them no friends amongst the other Arab countries.

--- 4. Our detailed comments on the paper are attached.

Yours,
J.H.S. —

(J. H. Symons)



Draft Memorandum on "The Iraqi Ba'ath"

Detailed Comments

✓ Para. 5, line 7 onwards: This would be clearer and more accurate were it to read: "By the beginning of 1967 there were two separate Ba'athi groups in Iraq. One consisted mainly of the majority of those who had led the Iraqi Ba'ath Party in 1963 and was still in relationship with the old International Command led by Michel Aflaq, Shibli al Aisami, Elias Farah and their colleagues. It was known as the "Right-Wing" Ba'ath to distinguish it from the other group popularly known as the "Left-Wing" Ba'ath which chose to support the Neo-Ba'ath in Syria after the overthrow of Amin al Hafez. The terms "Left-Wing" and "Right-Wing" are of little ideological significance. (There was also a small extremist group, the Arab Revolutionary Workers Party which had broken away from the Ba'ath Party but had not succeeded in gaining popular support. Its chairman was Ali Salih al Saadi whose gangsterish methods as Deputy Prime Minister and Chief of the National Guard in 1963 had contributed greatly to the fall of the régime.) It was the Right-Wing Ba'ath which participated in the coup of 17 July 1968 ...".

✓ 2. Para. 5, last 3 lines: However, the present Iraqi Government have adhered fairly closely to the programme that they drew up between August and November 1968 and appear to be carrying it out with determination.

✓ 3. Para. 6, line 10: Nayef was Director not Deputy Director, of Military Intelligence.

✓ 4. Para. 7: The descriptions appear too black and white and too elaborate. By what standards are any Ba'athists "conservative"? What is meant by progressive? It would be safer to describe the coalition simply as one between old guard Ba'athists who wanted to run the country on their own terms, and a collection of non-Ba'athist officers and others who were apposed to a party monopoly. On the last section of this paragraph we doubt if there is sufficient evidence to state so categorically that the non-Ba'athists involved in the 17 July coup wished to come to terms with the Kurds. As for following a policy of Iraq for the Iraqis, this seems a usual Iraqi trait.

✓ 5. Para. 8, line 18: Sheikhly is not an ex-officer.

all understood the connection → done ✓ 6. Para. 9, second sentence: There seems to be no connection between the clause "it was his successor's refusal to follow the advice of the palace group which precipitated the coup of 17 July," and the rest of the sentence.

✓ 7. Para. 9, last sentence: We would prefer the end of the sentence to read after "remaining in power": "particularly if its

/technique



✓ technique of penetration at all levels enables it to detect and stop any signs of disloyalty in the armed forces as a whole."

✓ 8. Para. 10, last 2 lines: In recent months, the Iraqi Government has appeared to be coping fairly efficiently with problems of administration; if not in absolute terms, at least its performance shows up very well by comparison with its immediate predecessor.

9. Para. 11. The first sentence should surely be amended to read "following the dictates of their respective International Commands". The passage after this is not in fact true. The International Command fabricated by the Syrian Ba'ath since 1965 is, as far as we know, powerless. The Aflaq International Command on the other hand is still respected in Iraq. From line 8 onwards the reasoning is somewhat opaque and the conclusion seems false. Over the period between mid-1967 and mid-1968, the Right-Wing Ba'ath in Iraq was able to build itself up into a far more formidable force than the Left-Wing and, while for obvious reasons it could not attract large-scale public support, it had the allegiance of the vast majority of the Ba'athis of the 1963 vintage well before July 1968. Since then, defections by opportunists to the Right-Wing have weakened the Left-Wing Ba'ath still further.

✓ 10. Para 12, line 3: There now appear to be 13 members of the Regional Command of whom 5 hold ministerial office. These statistics are however made somewhat irrelevant by the Third Amendment to the Provisional Constitution. The implication that the Party Programme is concerned primarily with consolidating the Party's grip on power is unfair. This element is obviously an important one and may have seemed the dominant one at the time the draft paper was written. However, it is now clear that other economic, social and political aspects of policy as laid down in the Party Programme at the end of 1968 are being tackled seriously.

✓ 11. Para. (13)², line 14: Omit the word "openly" lines 20-21: We assume that emphasis was laid on the need to avoid alarming people but I do not think we can be as categorical as this.

✓ 12. Para 14.: This paragraph reads rather awkwardly as at present drafted. We should in any case prefer "communist" to "socialist" and there seems no need to attach the qualifications about those supporting the Arabs. The phrases "Western imperialism" and "reaction" should be in inverted commas, as these are their terminology and not ours.

✓ 13. Para. 15, line 11: It is untrue to say that the régime prides itself on the moderation of its policies. The Iraqi Right-Wing Ba'ath Party, as it has so often said, aims to be the "vanguard of progressive Arab forces" and does not describe itself as Right-Wing. I do not think the Iraqis tell themselves that they can achieve such a position by adopting moderate policies. It is an

.../over-



over-simplification to talk of Iraq's policies tending to follow patterns set by the USSR and Cuba.

✓ 14. Para. 16, line 6: The International Command of the Right-Wing Ba'ath Party moved its Headquarters from Beirut to Baghdad shortly after the 17th July coup and Michel Aflaq himself has visited Iraq three times in 1969. While relations between the International Command and the Iraqi Right-Wing Ba'ath may not always be the friendliest, the International Command and the Regional Command work continuously in close co-operation. As far as we know, Salih al Bitar is no longer a member of the Ba'ath Party.

✓ 15. Para. 17.: The attempts by the Ba'ath to improve its popular image by creating a national front have surely been rather half-hearted. In any case it would seem better to turn this sentence slightly to read "Despite a number of attempts to create a national front and so improve its popular image the régime so far has had singularly little success, partly from its own lack of enthusiasm for any genuine co-operation but largely because of the one-sided terms offered to the other parties and which they find unacceptable." The major stumbling block preventing an agreement between the Communists and the Right-Wing Ba'ath is the refusal by the Ba'ath to authorise the reinstatement of a large number of Communist ex-officers in the armed forces, a refusal dictated by considerations of self-preservation. Mutual suspicion dating from 1963 survives.

✓ 16. Para. 18, line 8.: The party may not have won enthusiastic support in the armed forces but it has certainly prevented opposition developing. I do not think we can state so categorically that Ba'athi purges in the Civil Service have destroyed its integrity and efficiency. What sort of integrity did it have before? Is there any reason to believe in further deterioration - at least in integrity?

✓ 17. Para. 18, line 10: Perhaps "many" would be better than "all". We do not believe that in the majority of cases where non-Ba'athis have been replaced by Ba'athis that this has been done regardless of qualifications. At the end of this paragraph, we are doubtful whether cases other than that of Nasr al Hani can be quoted as examples of the use of political murder. Initially it did upset efficiency in the way you describe but by now it relies mainly on cross-posting and pensioning off of those deemed politically unreliable.

✓ 18. Para. 19.: Since this paper was written, the opening of this paragraph has become somewhat overtaken by events. One has the impression that the Government now feels that it can relax a little the tension which it had generated itself in order to survive.

✓ 19. Para. 19, sentence 2: The National Security Council has now been replaced by the Public Relations Bureau whose work is supervised personally by Saddam Hussain.

.../20.



✓ 20. Para. 19, line 16: It would have been helpful to know exactly what were the Shi'a apprehensions. Whatever they were, the government has taken a few steps designed to mollify them.

✓ 21. Para. 19, line 17: While it is true that the Iraqi Army has not this year conducted a full-scale offensive against the Kurds, their efforts to solve the Kurdish problem by a combination of bludgeoning and seeming concessions is by no means half-hearted by comparison with what was attempted in the two years previous to the Ba'athi takeover. It is also true that they have been no more effective.

✓ 22. Para 19, line 21: Again, we do not think there has been a further decline in the honesty of the Civil Service.

23. Para. 20: This seems to us to miss the whole theoretical basis of Iraqi foreign policy - the determination to base their relations with other states on those states' "attitude to the Palestine problem". However many exceptions one finds to this in practice, this remains official policy and as such should be quoted. The list in line 3 can now be considerably lengthened. It is hard to assess the effect of the Rabat Conference on Iraq's relations with the other "confrontation States" but this too may necessitate some amendment here.

✓ 24. Para. 20, line 15: The Right-Wing Ba'ath has not been absolutely ineffectual in building up its influence elsewhere in the Arab world. It is now sufficiently active in the Gulf to be a source of concern to us.

✓ 25. Para. 20, line 17: Iraq has no Embassy in Aden. Perhaps the writer means Ta'iz.

✗ 26. Para. 21: Apart from the fact that this is an over-simplification of the Party's internal situation, we have no evidence that Ammash favours rapprochement with the Syrian Ba'ath or that Sheikhly and Saddam Hussain are Left-Wing extremists. We could not necessarily agree with your last sentence in para. 21 and this should be omitted.

✓ 27. Para. 22: Despite the truth of the statement that it is a government of few strengths, nonetheless these do include a conviction, without precedence in Republican Iraq, of its ideological rightness. In line 7 of this paragraph, which constitution is meant? In any case no-one in Iraq would hold this to be against them.

✓ 28. Para. 23, lines 1 and 2: It seems to me that the Ba'ath has very successfully consolidated its position even though it may not yet have secured a working agreement with other political parties and the publicity given to its (successful) agricultural projects and the fact that it seems to be able to guarantee some sort of political stability are beginning to win for it a type of popular support.



✓ 29. Para. 24, last line: We do not think we can say that the Right-Wing Ba'ath Party is at present inefficient and corrupt, and the comparison with the Wafd is absurd.

✓ 30. Para. 25, line 9: Rather its "Pan-Arabism" is a cover for its nationalism. In Iraq, Arab unity means unity under Iraqi leadership just as in Cairo it means unity under Egyptian leadership. There is no "complete contradiction" between Pan-Arabism and nationalism.

✓ 31. Para. 25, line 12: Petty-bourgeois, perhaps - bourgeois, certainly not.

Annex A giving regional command of the Right-Wing Ba'ath Party (Iraq) should be amended to read as follows:-

The Regional Command of the Right-Wing
Ba'ath Party (Iraq)

Ahmad Hasan Al Bakr ✓
Saddam Hussain ✓
Salih Mehdi Ammash ✓
Abdul Karim Shaikhly ✓
*Izzat Mustafa ✓
Salah Omar Al Ali ✓
Abdul Khaliq Al Samarra'ie ✓
Na'im Haddad ✓
Izzat Al Duri ✓
Murtadha Al Hadithi ✓
Samir Abdul Aziz Al Najim ✓
Abdullah Sallum ✓
Taha Al Jizrawi ✓

*In spite of statements to the contrary in the press, Izzat Mustafa has several times been referred to as a Member of the Regional Command since the Third Amendment, and I am assured that he is so.

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(2)

Reference 22 6/5.

Mr. Ford.

Mr. Ammitage

Mr. Iraqi - Sa'ath

I attach herewith the final draft of the above memorandum which has now been cleared with Baghdad, brought up to date. Subject to amendment by Mr. Ford it is now ready for printing, I attach a Distribution Sheet.

Approved for issue

J.F. 5/2

A. and

Middle East Section

4 February 1970

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RESEARCH DEPARTMENT MEMORANDUM

The Iraqi Ba'ath (July 1968 - January 1970)

SUMMARY

- A. The memorandum aims at presenting a picture of the Ba'ath régime which has been in power in Iraq since July, 1968. (Paragraphs 1 and 2)
- B. The previous Ba'ath régime, that of 1963, had never commanded much support in the country, and fell largely because of its own internal divisions. It was one of the most unpopular régimes ever to have governed in Iraq. (Paragraphs 3-5)
- C. There were two successful coups in Baghdad in July, 1968: the first engineered by a coalition of right-wing Ba'athists and a group of Army officers known as "The Palace Group"; the second by the Ba'ath against their erstwhile collaborators. Both were bloodless, and in both the attitude of the Republican Guard and of the Baghdad garrison were of decisive importance. (Paragraphs 6-9)

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D. On coming to power the Regional Command outlined a political programme which followed predictable lines, but which was concerned initially with the ways and means of keeping itself in power. Latterly, with eighteen months of control behind it, it has begun to show signs of attempting to practice what it preached. (Paragraphs 10-16)

E. It has been least successful in its attempts to broaden the basis of its rule by creation of a National Front which would include other political groups, and it has all along adopted methods of calculated severity as a means of suppressing opposition. Its rule is that of a minority clique whose internal cohesion is by no means certain. (Paragraphs 17-21)

F. The Government appears to be one of few strengths, but to be conducted by determined and often ruthless men who have no intention of sharing power with anyone else. So far they have been successful in consolidating their hold on the country, and so long as they can retain control of the armed forces a counter-group seems unlikely to succeed.

ANNEX A. The Regional Command Council in Iraq.

ANNEX B. The Structure of the Ba'ath Party.

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The Iraqi Ba'ath (July 1968-January 1970)

I. Introduction

The Ba'ath Party in Iraq first came to power as the result of the coup of February 1963 in which Abdel Kerim Qasim was overthrown and assassinated, and held office for some nine months before being ousted by the man whom it had chosen as its figurehead, President Abdel Salam Aref. The Ba'ath boasted that its eclipse would be of short duration, and that it would soon return to power, but in the event it had to wait nearly five years, until July 1968.

2. It is the object of this memorandum to try and place the present régime in its proper perspective against the background of Iraqi politics, to discover in what ways it resembles or differs from its predecessor, to examine its ideology, methods and party organization and finally, to decide whether in fact the Party has a political viability of its own, or whether it merely affords political cover for a group of opportunist and not very united army officers.

II. The Background to the Coup of July 1968.

3. Its nine months in power in 1963 showed clearly how little genuine support the Ba'ath

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was able to command in the country as a whole, and how far it was from being able to maintain the semblance of unity. For this there were a number of reasons - the peculiarities of the party organization which placed a premium on secretiveness and elitism, its pan-Arabism as opposed to Iraqi nationalism, the strong contrast between its democratic and even liberal ideologies and its authoritarian and repressive methods of rule, its nepotism, corruption and lack of administrative ability, and its use of violence and of the National Guard for purpose of paying off old scores and of maintaining itself in power.

4. By the time it fell it had probably achieved the distinction of having been the most unpopular régime ever to have governed Iraq, and President Araf who, whatever else his weaknesses and foibles, had a remarkable understanding of the characteristics of the men with whom he had to deal, coupled with a real flair for political intrigue, had little difficulty in getting rid of a régime which was not only detested, but had also been hopelessly weakened by its own dissensions.

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5. The Ba'ath which was ousted in the "apostasy" of November, 1963⁽¹⁾ was no longer a united party, and the split which first appeared during its months in power was deepened even further during the period of "negative militancy" covering the years between 1964 and 1968. By the beginning of 1967 it was possible to distinguish two separate Ba'ath groups in Iraq - the right-wing Ba'ath, composed mainly of those who had led the Party in 1963 and which was still associated with the International Command, led by Michel Aflaq, thus enabling them to entitle themselves the Regional Ba'ath (Al Nish al Ba'ath fi Qutr al Iraq) and a left-wing group, Marxist in ideology (Al Ba'ath al Yasiri) and aligned with the neo-Ba'athists who had overthrown Hafez al Amin in Syria. There was also a much smaller, extremist group, of which the leading personality was Ali Salih al Sa'adi, Deputy Prime Minister in the 1963 government, whose methods as controller of the National Guard in 1963 had contributed greatly to the fall of the régime.

(1)

Two such "apostasies" have taken their place in the canon of current right-wing Ba'ath political jargon - that of 18 November, 1963 resulting in the fall and disintegration of the Party in Iraq, and that of 23 February, 1966, in which Hafez al Amin's régime in Syria was overthrown in the ~~gung~~ led by Salih al Jaidi.

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It was the first of these, the right-wing Ba'ath, which participated in the gun of 17 July, 1968, and then itself carried out the further gun of 30 July; and while it has some claim to be regarded as representative of orthodox Ba'athism, it is noticeable that, as happened with previous Ba'ath régimes, both in Iraq and Syria, the exigencies of the exercise of power have tended to make nonsense of party doctrine. There are, however, signs that with the exercise of power, and the increasing confidence thus generated, the Government is making genuinely determined efforts to carry out the programme devised during the latter months of 1968.

III. The Gun of July, 1968.

6. On 17 July, 1968 a number of officers known as the "Palace Group", allegedly also members of the Arab Revolutionary Movement, in conjunction with a number of right-wing Ba'athists carried out a bloodless gun which resulted in the deposition and exile of President Abdul Rahman Arif. The part played by the officers was underlined by the appointment of one of their number, Colonel Abdul Razzag Nayef (Director of Military Intelligence) as Prime Minister, and of another,

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Lt.-Colonel Ibrahim Abdel Rahman Dawd (O.C. Republican Guard Brigade) as Minister of Defense. The Presidency went to a veteran Ba'athist, General Ahmed Hassan al Bakr, who had been Prime Minister in 1963, and the Ministry of the Interior to another, General Salah Mehdi Ammash. The key posts in the Government were thus allotted to the planners of the 17 July coup, the remainder being given in the main to professionals who were experts in their respective spheres, Salih Kubba at the Ministry of Finance, Nasr al Hani at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Mahdi Hantoush at the Ministry of Oil.

7. The new Government was thus a coalition between right-wing Ba'athists who were conservative in outlook and who tended also to be anti-Egyptian, anti-Communist and prepared, in the main, to follow fairly middle of the road policies, and the "Palace Group", most of them younger men with more revolutionary ideas, who would have liked to establish their rule on as broad (and so not exclusively Ba'athist) a basis as possible, and who were opposed to a party monopoly.

8. In such a coalition it was only a matter of time before one of the groups moved against the other. The Ba'athists were the more

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experienced and better prepared, and less than a fortnight after the coup the inhabitants of Baghdad were made aware, by the presence in the streets of the tanks of the 10 Armoured Brigade, that a new upheaval was taking place. The Prime Minister meanwhile had been invited to the Presidential Palace, and was there arrested and flown out immediately to Morocco. The Minister of Defense, who was visiting Iraqi units in Jordan, was similarly arrested and deported to Rome. It is believed that the driving force behind the new coup was that very experienced intriguer Salah Mubdi Amash, assisted by Abdel Kerim Abdel Sattar al Sheikhli, who became Minister of Foreign Affairs in the new Government. The coup, however, owed much of its success to the defection of the Commander of the Republican Guard who deserted his friends in the "Palace Group" and went over to the Ba'ath.

9. Both gangs demonstrated very clearly the present importance of the Guard and, to a lesser extent, of the Baghdad garrison, in the making and unmaking of Governments. The former had been greatly expanded, pampered and heavily armed by Abdel Salam Aref, and it

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was his successor's refusal to follow the advice of the "Palace Group" which precipitated the coup of 17 July. Again, in the coup of 30 July, it was the attitude of the Guard, or rather of its Commander, which appears to have been decisive, and it would seem that as long as the Government can be certain of the loyalty of the Guard and of the garrison of Baghdad it can be fairly confident of remaining in power, ^{and} particularly as long as its system of ^{filtration} penetration at all levels in the Armed Forces continues to be effective.

FILTRATION

IV. The Ba'ath Administration:
(July 1968 - January 1970)

10. The Ba'ath, a pan-Arab party with a supra-national organization, has nevertheless built up an elaborate structure on a cell system (see Annex B) typical of a clandestine minority group, which it has indeed been for much of its existence. As a result it has evolved as an isolated, doctrinaire elite with little popular standing, and when it has come to power it has displaced the weaknesses of its development in its lack of the common touch and of the essentials of administrative efficiency. Recently, with greater confidence and sense of stability, there have been signs that much of this weakness is on the way to being overcome.

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11. As far as policy is concerned the Party is committed nominally to following the dictates of the International Command, but in fact the Regional Commands have a good deal of autonomy, and both in Syria, and even more so in Iraq, have followed independent policies imposed by local conditions, and dictated by personal ambitions. Moreover, by the time the Iraqi Ba'ath returned to power in July 1968 the old International Command had ceased to exist, though that part of it which remained loyal to Michel Aflaq still commanded some respect in Iraq. The régime itself is representative of one wing only of Iraqi Ba'athism, although undoubtedly the much more powerful, reinforced as it has been by opportunist defections which have left the left-wing Ba'ath weaker than ever.

12. The framing and direction of policy is in the hands of the Regional Command Council, a body of 13 Ba'athists, only 5 of whom hold office in the Government (see Annex A). The programme which it sketched out for itself was to some extent concerned with consolidation of its own internal position. The usual tribute was paid to pan-Arabism and the need to co-operate with other Arab countries, the UAR in particular, but the main emphasis was laid on

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the need to allot key posts in the Armed Forces, Police, Intelligence and Civil Service to loyal Party members. All services were to be purged of their non-Ba'ath elements and steps taken to indoctrinate sympathetic and malleable material. Further emphasis was laid on the dominant rôle of the Command Council, ~~the supreme authority~~ ~~of which the Ba'ath Party~~ security in particular being kept under its direct control.

13. As regards relations with other Parties efforts were to be made to secure the co-operation of the Nasserists, Nationalists and certain Communist groups, with a view to forming a National Front and broadening the basis of its support. From any such Front, however, such religio-political movements as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Front were to be excluded, and every effort was to be made to undermine and destroy rival Ba'ath groups. Finally, a "positive attitude" was to be adopted towards imperialist-inspired plots against the régime. One mistake which was not repeated was that of openly re-establishing the National Guard, the excesses of which had contributed so much to the unpopularity of the 1963 régime. Propaganda

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was to be used with discretion and Party members were to be given suitable posts where they might make their political influence felt, but emphasis was laid on the need to avoid alarming the people.

14. In foreign policy the programme followed predictable lines, support, as noted above, for pan-Arabism, restricted however, to "progressive" countries only, military action against Israel and support for guerrilla organisations, strengthening of relations with Communist countries, continuance of the struggle against "western imperialism", "Zionism" and "reaction", and the promotion and consolidation of Arab interests in the Persian Gulf.

15. At home the régime pledged itself to bring the oil companies under national control, to settle the Kurdish problem, to expedite agrarian reform and to expand irrigation, in all of which both at home and abroad, the Iraqi Command followed fairly closely time-honoured party doctrines of social reform, secularism, anti-Zionism and anti-imperialism and promotion of Arab unity with, however, a greater slant to the left than might have been expected. The régime prides itself on being in "the Vanguard of progressive Arab

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forces" and as such tends to follow extreme socialist policies.

16. It is to be remembered also that many in the régime are Ba'athists for opportunist reasons only. They are preponderantly Sunnis from central Iraq who have little political sensibility, ^{and} a vague idea of how to achieve their aims, and little interest in maintaining such links as still exist with the rump of the International Command, which moved its headquarters from Beirut to Baghdad shortly after the coup of 17 July. Although opposed in theory to military autocracy, they are many of them ex-officers who have had to rely on the Army both to bring them to power and to keep them there. To a great extent, therefore, they have to adapt their policies to the views of the senior officers among their supporters, and as suggested in paragraph 9 above, the attitude of the Republican Guard and of the Baghdad garrison is all-important.

The Régime in Action

17. Despite a number of attempts to create a National Front and so improve its popular image the régime so far has had little success, largely because of its own lack of enthusiasm for genuine cooperation with any other group, and to the one-sidedness of the terms offered. The main stumbling block to agreement with the

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Communists is the refusal of the Ba'ath to agree to the reinstatement of numbers of Communist officers in the Armed Forces, nor have the Communists forgotten their persecution at the hands of the National Guard in 1963.

Efforts to bring in some of the smaller and less important groups such as the Arab Socialist Movement or the Socialist Unity Party, have not been any more successful, largely because once again, though to a lesser extent than in 1963, the Ba'ath has shown itself reluctant to make concessions.

18. It appears also to have had no great success in winning support in the Armed Forces, especially in those units on active service in Jordan and in the north, mainly because of the severity of its anti-Ba'athist purges, and promotion of junior pre-Ba'athists over the heads of senior and more competent officers. So far however it has been successful in countering the development of opposition. It has destroyed even further the efficiency of the Civil Service by giving Ba'athists in many posts of importance regardless of qualifications, and has settled, rather more discreetly than in the past, a number of old scores by indiscriminate arrest and confinement of Nasserists,

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Communists, left-wing Ba'athists and Islamic Front sympathisers, and which in one case at least does not appear to have stepped short of political murder.

19. The early months in power were devoted mainly to the consolidation of its position by methods the calculated severity of which may have produced the results expected of them but which in the long run must have added much to the unpopularity of the régime. It also showed intolerance and inability to compromise in its treatment of minorities and foreign, mainly western, interests (the expulsion of the European staff of the Jesuit Hikma University is only one case in point); it has lived up to the Shi'i apprehensions that no concessions were to be expected from a Sunni, doctrinaire and militarily-dominated régime, and its efforts to deal with the Kurdish problem have not been successful. In domestic affairs it has achieved rather more but, as remarked above, the efficiency of the Civil Service has been depreciated further by the appointment of party members to posts for which they have no qualifications.

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20. In foreign affairs the Party has veered to the left with its financial and aid agreements with the Soviet bloc, ⁽³⁾ its harassment of the oil companies, its recognition of East Germany and its persecution of former political leaders on charges of collaboration with imperialism. It favours an all-out military assault on Israel under a Unified Arab Command, but is on bad, or at the best hardly cordial, terms with the other States involved, the UAR, Jordan and Syria. The Party would like, however, to play a greater part in Arab affairs than it does now, and there are signs that it is attempting to build up its influence through party members in its embassies in Kuwait, the Sudan, Syria and some other Arab countries, particularly in the Persian Gulf States, where it sees itself as the champion of Arabism against the ambitions and encroachments of Iran. While only moderately interested in the Persian Gulf the régime on the whole supports the creation of the Union of Arab Emirates, ^{though} it would be unlikely to tolerate for long the existence of the "feudal reactionary" Sheikdoms which would compose it.

(3) Recent examples are the sulphur deal with Poland, the agreement between INOC and Mashinexport (USSR) for supply of oil equipment and technical help; the loan of \$70 million from the USSR for development of the North Rumaila oilfield, and the \$84 million credit from East Germany for industrial projects.

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21. Not only is the Ba'ath an unpopular minority régime, it is also a most divided one. Internal rivalry appears to centre round the two Deputy Prime Ministers, General Saleh Nohdi Annash, who is also Minister of the Interior, and General Hardan Abdel Ghaffar al Takriti, the Minister of Defense. They are both of them old hands at political intrigue, but whereas Annash favours ~~rapprochement~~ with the Syrian Ba'ath and extreme measures, both against "reaction" abroad and opposition at home, and is supported by the left-wing and extremist members of the Party such as Abdel Kerim Abdel Sattar al Sheikhli, Minister of Foreign Affairs, ~~Muhammad Hassan al Takriti~~ and Abdullah Salim al Samarra'i, Minister of Culture and National Guidance, Takriti, a highly skilled and opportunist tactician, with the bulk of the Ba'athist officers in the Armed Forces behind him, and the support of the President, is inclined, for his own purposes, to follow less radical and more traditional Ba'ath policies. So far the two men have been evenly matched, but Takriti, despite support in the Army, is mistrusted on account of the part he is alleged to have played in the fall of the régime in 1963, and it is noteworthy that he is not a member of

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the Regional Command Council. Recently, however, Saddam Hussein al Takriti has improved his position on appointment as V/Chairman of the Regional Command Council in which he is well placed to succeed should anything happen to the President.

V. Conclusions

22. It must be concluded that this is a Government of few strengths and not a few weaknesses, one of whose main concerns has been to protect itself against summary ~~dismissal~~ *overthrow*. No régime thus concerned with its own survival is likely to govern well or to relax the methods by which it retains control. In this the present régime is probably no worse or better than some of its predecessors, and the fact remains that by one means or another it has maintained itself in power for some eighteen months and is showing signs of finding time to tackle some of the country's more pressing problems. The economy is in better ^{shape} *condition* than it was, and by Iraqi standards it is giving proof of some stability, but it has yet to secure the support of other political groups, and requires to show a much greater measure of toleration in a country which, apart from other party differences, contains

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sizeable minorities in the Kurds, the Shi'is and the Christians, and to compromise to a far greater extent than it has shown itself ready to do, before it can claim to have any real degree of general support. ~~in the country.~~

23. As remarked above it is a highly elitist organisation which has few grass roots. Its system of recruitment and its structure set a premium on isolation and secrecy, characteristics which, however admirable and desirable they may be in opposition and under suppression, are no longer so in office. It is government by a clique of on the whole uncompromising, utterly determined and often ruthless men who have not hesitated to use violence to suppress any suspicion of opposition. Such methods, supplemented as they are by purges, cross-postings, grass root indoctrination and infiltration of the armed forces and civil service are calculated to keep potential plotters at bay and in such a state of fear, disorganisation and uncertainty as to make the successful mounting of a coup improbable. The other side of the coin is that the régime has tended to withdraw even more upon itself and to become even more inaccessible in its search for anonymity in the exercise of power. The changes in

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the constitution which took place in November 1969 have meant that the Regional Command of the Party have virtually taken over as the government of the country and it looks as if the door has closed on thoughts of cooperation with any other group.

24. In Iraq it has developed certain typical national characteristics. The fanatic streak always evident in its doctrine has developed into partisan violence in the tough climate of Iraqi politics, and it has become, even more so than in Syria, the facade for an authoritarian and opportunist military group for whom Ba'athism is largely a convenient political label, and whose nationalism is a contradiction of its pan-Arabism. Even less than in Syria does it rest on popular support, and it appears to have appealed most strongly to the bourgeois strata of Iraqi society, the middle class Army officers and professional men, lawyers, politicians, school teachers and university students. It is thus the party of a very small segment of Iraqi society. Prior to 1963 it was of no great importance and its behaviour in power served only to deepen popular dislike and distrust, which the present régime has done little to dissipate. The gap between the people and the Party,

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between its own ideology and police methods of rule is yet to be bridged. So long, however, as it can command military support of the sort suggested in paragraph 9 above it is likely to remain in power for what could be quite some time.

Middle East Section,
FOO Research Department.
February, 1970.

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ANNEX A

The Regional Command Council in Iraq

| | |
|---|---|
| Ahmed Hassan al Bakr, | President and Prime Minister. |
| Saidan Hussein al Takriti, | V/Chairman of RCC. |
| Salah Nohdi Ammash, | D/Prime Minister and Minister of Interior. |
| Abdel Kerim Abdel Sattar al Sheikhi, | Minister of Foreign Affairs. |
| Abdullah Salim al Samarra, | Minister of Culture and Information. |
| Issat Mustafa, | Minister of Health. |
| Salah Omar Ali | |
| Abdel Kholiq al Samarra | |
| Murtadha al Hadithi | |
| Issat al Duri | |
| Samir Abdel Aziz al Hajin | |
| Haim Haidad | |
| Taha Jisrawi | |

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ANNEX 1

The Structure of the Ba'ath Party

1. International Command (Al Qayadat al Qawmiya)
2. Regional Command (Syria) Regional Command (Iraq) (Al Qayadat al Qutriya) Other Regional Commands
3. Branches (Furu')
4. Departments (Shu'ab)
5. Divisions (Firq)
6. Areas (Mamatiq)
7. Sections (Qita')
8. Cells (Urat)

1. Elected by International Congress of the Party.
2. Elected by Regional Congresses.
3. Secretaries of Departments and Party nominees.
4. Selected members of Divisions.
5. 3 - 6 Area members.
6. Selected Section leaders.
7. Cell leaders.
8. 3 - 5 members.

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(23905)

(5 February, 1970)

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RESEARCH DEPARTMENT MEMORANDUM

THE IRAQI BA'ATH (JULY 1968-JANUARY 1970)

SUMMARY

A. The memorandum aims at presenting a picture of the Ba'ath régime which has been in power in Iraq since July 1968. (Paragraphs 1-2.)

B. The previous Ba'ath régime, that of 1963, had never commanded much support in the country, and fell largely because of its own internal divisions. It was one of the most unpopular régimes ever to have governed in Iraq. (Paragraphs 3-5.)

C. There were two successful *coups* in Baghdad in July 1968: the first engineered by a coalition of Right-wing Ba'athists and a group of army officers known as "The Palace Group"; the second by the Ba'ath against their erstwhile collaborators. Both were bloodless, and in both the attitude of the Republican Guard and of the Baghdad garrison were of decisive importance. (Paragraphs 6-9.)

D. On coming to power the Regional Command outlined a political programme which followed predictable lines, but which was concerned initially with the ways and means of keeping itself in power. Latterly, with 18 months of control behind it, it has begun to shown signs of attempting to practice what it preached. (Paragraphs 10-16.)

E. It has been least successful in its attempts to broaden the basis of its rule by creation of a National Front which would include other political groups, and it has all along adopted methods of calculated severity as a means of suppressing opposition. Its rule is that of a minority clique whose internal cohesion is by no means certain. (Paragraphs 17-21.)

F. The Government appears to be one of few strengths, but to be conducted by determined and often ruthless men who have no intention of sharing power with anyone else. So far they have been successful in consolidating their hold on the country, and so long as they can retain control of the armed forces a counter-coup seems unlikely to succeed.

Annex A. The Regional Command Council in Iraq.

Annex B. The structure of the Ba'ath Party.

I. Introduction

The Ba'ath Party in Iraq first came to power as the result of the *coup* of February 1963 in which Abdel Kerim Qasim was overthrown and assassinated, and held office for some nine months before being ousted by the man whom it had chosen as its figurehead, President Abdel Salam Aref. The Ba'ath boasted that its eclipse would be of short duration, and that it would soon return to power, but in the event it had to wait nearly five years, until July 1968.

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2. It is the object of this memorandum to try and place the present régime in its proper perspective against the background of Iraqi politics, to discover in what ways it resembles or differs from its predecessor, to examine its ideology, methods and party organisation and, finally, to decide whether in fact the party has a political viability of its own, or whether it merely affords political cover for a group of opportunist and not very united army officers.

II. The background to the coup of July 1968

3. Its nine months in power in 1963 showed clearly how little genuine support the Ba'ath was able to command in the country as a whole, and how far it was from being able to maintain the semblance of unity. For this there were a number of reasons—the peculiarities of the party organisation which placed a premium on secretiveness and élitism, its pan-Arabism as opposed to Iraqi nationalism, the strong contrast between its democratic and even liberal ideologies and its authoritarian and repressive methods of rule, its nepotism, corruption and lack of administrative ability, and its use of violence and of the National Guard for the purpose of paying off old scores and of maintaining itself in power.

4. By the time it fell it had probably achieved the distinction of having been the most unpopular régime ever to have governed Iraq, and President Aref who, whatever else his weaknesses and foibles, had a remarkable understanding of the characteristics of the men with whom he had to deal, coupled with a real flair for political intrigue, had little difficulty in getting rid of a régime which was not only detested, but had also been hopelessly weakened by its own dissensions.

5. The Ba'ath which was ousted in the "apostasy" of November 1963⁽¹⁾ was no longer a united party, and the split which first appeared during its months in power was deepened even further during the period of "negative militancy" covering the years between 1964 and 1968. By the beginning of 1967 it was possible to distinguish two separate Ba'ath groups in Iraq—the Right-wing Ba'ath, composed mainly of those who had led the party in 1963 and which was still associated with the International Command, led by Michel Aflaq, thus enabling them to entitle themselves the Regional Ba'ath (*Al Hizb al Ba'ath fi Qutr al Iraq*) and a Left-wing group, Marxist in ideology (*Al Ba'ath al Yasiri*) and aligned with the neo-Ba'athists who had overthrown Hafiz al Amin in Syria. There was also a much smaller, extremist group, of which the leading personality was Ali Saleh al Sa'adi, Deputy Prime Minister in the 1963 Government, whose methods as controller of the National Guard in 1963 had contributed greatly to the fall of the régime. It was the first of these, the Right-wing Ba'ath, which participated in the *coup* of 17 July, 1968, and then itself carried out the further *coup* of 30 July; and while it has some claim to be regarded as representative of orthodox Ba'athism, it is noticeable that, as happened with previous Ba'ath régimes, both in Iraq and Syria, the expediences of the exercise of power have tended to make nonsense of party doctrine. There are, however, signs that with the exercise of power, and the increasing confidence thus generated, the Government is making genuinely determined efforts to carry out the programme devised during the latter months of 1968.

III. The coups of July 1968

6. On 17 July, 1968, a number of officers known as the "Palace Group", allegedly also members of the Arab Revolutionary Movement, in conjunction with a number of Right-wing Ba'athists carried out a bloodless *coup* which resulted

⁽¹⁾ Two such "apostasies" have taken their place in the canon of current Right-wing Ba'ath political jargon—that of 18 November, 1963, resulting in the fall and disintegration of the party in Iraq, and that of 23 February, 1966, in which Hafiz al Amin's régime in Syria was overthrown in the *coup* led by Saleh al Jedid.

in the deposition and exile of President Abdel Rahman Aref. The part played by the officers was underlined by the appointment of one of their number, Colonel Abdel Razzag Nayef (Director of Military Intelligence), as Prime Minister, and of another, Lieutenant-Colonel Ibrahim Abdel Rahman Daud (OC Republican Guard Brigade), as Minister of Defence. The Presidency went to a veteran Ba'athist, General Ahmed Hassan al Bakr, who had been Prime Minister in 1963, and the Ministry of the Interior to another, General Saleh Mehdi Ammash. The key posts in the Government were thus allotted to the planners of the 17 July *coup*, the remainder being given in the main to professionals who were experts in their respective spheres, Salih Kubba at the Ministry of Finance, Nasr al Hani at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Mahdi Hantoush at the Ministry of Oil.

7. The new Government was thus a coalition between Right-wing Ba'athists who were conservative in outlook and who tended also to be anti-Egyptian, anti-Communist and prepared, in the main, to follow fairly middle of the road policies, and the "Palace Group", most of them younger men with more revolutionary ideas, who would have liked to establish their rule on as broad (and so not exclusively Ba'athist) a basis as possible, and who were opposed to a party monopoly.

8. In such a coalition it was only a matter of time before one of the groups moved against the other. The Ba'athists were the more experienced and better prepared, and less than a fortnight after the *coup* the inhabitants of Baghdad were made aware, by the presence in the streets of the tanks of the 10 Armoured Brigade, that a new upheaval was taking place. The Prime Minister meanwhile had been invited to the Presidential Palace, and was there arrested and flown out immediately to Morocco. The Minister of Defence, who was visiting Iraqi units in Jordan, was similarly arrested and deported to Rome. It is believed that the driving force behind the new *coup* was that very experienced intriguer Saleh Mehdi Ammash, assisted by Abdel Kerim Abdel Sattar al Sheikhli, who became Minister of Foreign Affairs in the new Government. The *coup*, however, owed much of its success to the defection of the Commander of the Republican Guard who deserted his friends in the "Palace Group" and went over to the Ba'ath.

9. Both *coups* demonstrated very clearly the present importance of the Guard and, to a lesser extent, of the Baghdad garrison, in the making and unmaking of Governments. The former had been greatly expanded, pampered and heavily armed by Abdel Salam Aref, and it was his successor's refusal to follow the advice of the "Palace Group" which precipitated the *coup* of 17 July. Again, in the *coup* of 30 July, it was the attitude of the Guard, or rather of its Commander, which appears to have been decisive, and it would seem that as long as the Government can be certain of the loyalty of the Guard and of the garrison of Baghdad it can be fairly confident of remaining in power, particularly as long as its system of filtration at all levels in the armed forces continues to be effective.

IV. The Ba'ath Administration (July 1968-January 1970)

10. The Ba'ath, a pan-Arab party with a supra-national organisation, has nevertheless built up an elaborate structure on a cell system (see Annex B) typical of a clandestine minority group, which it has indeed been for much of its existence. As a result it has evolved as an isolated, doctrinaire élite with little popular standing, and when it has come to power it has displayed the weaknesses of its development in its lack of the common touch and of the essentials of administrative efficiency. Recently, with greater confidence and sense of stability, there have been signs that much of this weakness is on the way to being overcome.

11. As far as policy is concerned the party is committed nominally to following the dictates of the International Command, but in fact the Regional Commands

have a good deal of autonomy and, both in Syria and even more so in Iraq, have followed independent policies imposed by local conditions and dictated by personal ambitions. Moreover, by the time the Iraqi Ba'ath returned to power in July 1968 the old International Command had ceased to exist, though that part of it which remained loyal to Michel Aflaq still commanded some respect in Iraq. The régime itself is representative of one wing only of Iraqi Ba'athism, although undoubtedly the much most powerful, reinforced as it has been by opportunist defections which have left the Left-wing Ba'ath weaker than ever.

12. The framing and direction of policy is in the hands of the Regional Command Council, a body of 13 Ba'athists, only 5 of whom hold office in the Government (see Annex A). The programme which is sketched out for itself was to some extent concerned with consolidation of its own internal position. The usual tribute was paid to pan-Arabism and the need to co-operate with other Arab countries, the UAR in particular, but the main emphasis was laid on the need to allot key posts in the Armed Forces, Police, Intelligence and Civil Service to loyal party members. All services were to be purged of their non-Ba'ath elements and steps taken to indoctrinate sympathetic and malleable material. Further emphasis was laid on the dominant role of the Command Council, security in particular being kept under its direct control.

13. As regards relations with other parties efforts were to be made to secure the co-operation of the Nasserists, Nationalists and certain Communist groups, with a view to forming a National Front and broadening the basis of its support. From any such Front, however, such religio-political movements as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Front were to be excluded, and every effort was to be made to undermine and destroy rival Ba'ath groups. Finally, a "positive attitude" was to be adopted towards imperialist-inspired plots against the régime. One mistake which was not repeated was that of openly re-establishing the National Guard, the excesses of which had contributed so much to the unpopularity of the 1963 régime. Propaganda was to be used with discretion and party members were to be given suitable posts where they might make their political influence felt, but emphasis was laid on the need to avoid alarming the people.

14. In foreign policy the programme followed predictable lines, support, as noted above, for pan-Arabism, restricted however, to "progressive" countries only, military action against Israel and support for guerilla organisations, strengthening of relations with Communist countries, continuance of the struggle against "Western imperialism", "Zionism" and "reaction", and the promotion and consolidation of Arab interests in the Persian Gulf.

15. At home the régime pledged itself to bring the oil companies under national control, to settle the Kurdish problem, to expedite agrarian reform and to expand irrigation, in all of which both at home and abroad, the Iraqi Command followed fairly closely time-honoured party doctrines of social reform, secularism, anti-Zionism and anti-imperialism and promotion of Arab unity with, however, a greater slant to the Left than might have been expected. The régime prides itself on being in "the Vanguard of progressive Arab forces" and as such tends to follow extreme Socialist policies.

16. It is to be remembered also that many in the régime are Ba'athists for opportunist reasons only. They are preponderantly Sunnis from central Iraq who have little political sensibility, only a vague idea of how to achieve their aims, and little interest in maintaining such links as still exist with the rump of the International Command, which moved its headquarters from Beirut to Baghdad shortly after the *coup* of 17 July. Although opposed in theory to military autocracy, they are many

of them ex-officers who have had to rely on the army both to bring them to power and to keep them there. To a great extent, therefore, they have to adapt their policies to the views of the senior officers among their supporters, and as suggested in paragraph 9 above, the attitude of the Republican Guard and of the Baghdad garrison is all-important.

The régime in action

17. Despite a number of attempts to create a National Front and so improve its popular image the régime so far has had little success, largely because of its own lack of enthusiasm for genuine co-operation with any other group, and to the one-sidedness of the terms offered. The main stumbling block to agreement with the Communists is the refusal of the Ba'ath to agree to the reinstatement of numbers of Communist officers in the armed forces, nor have the Communists forgotten their persecution at the hands of the National Guard in 1963. Efforts to bring in some of the smaller and less important groups such as the Arab Socialist Movement or the Socialist Unity Party, have not been any more successful, largely because once again, though to a lesser extent than in 1963, the Ba'ath has shown itself reluctant to make concessions.

18. It appears also to have had no great success in winning support in the armed forces, especially in those units on active service in Jordan and in the north, mainly because of the severity of its anti-Ba'athist purges, and promotion of junior pro-Ba'athists over the heads of senior and more competent officers. So far however it has been successful in countering the development of opposition. It has destroyed even further the efficiency of the Civil Service by placing Ba'athists in many posts of importance regardless of qualifications, and has settled, rather more discreetly than in the past, a number of old scores by indiscriminate arrest and confinement of Nasserists, Communists, Left-wing Ba'athists and Islamic Front sympathisers, and which in one case at least does not appear to have stopped short of political murder.

19. The early months in power were devoted mainly to the consolidation of its position by methods the calculated severity of which may have produced the results expected of them but which in the long run must have added much to the unpopularity of the régime. It also showed intolerance and inability to compromise in its treatment of minorities and foreign, mainly Western, interests (the expulsion of the European staff of the Jesuit Hikma University is only one case in point); it has lived up to Shi'i apprehensions that no concessions were to be expected from a Sunni, doctrinaire and militarily-dominated régime, and its efforts to deal with the Kurdish problem have not been successful. In domestic affairs it has achieved rather more but, as remarked above, the efficiency of the Civil Service has been depreciated further by the appointment of party members to posts for which they have no qualifications.

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V. Conclusions

22. It must be concluded that this is a Government of few strengths and not a few weaknesses, one of whose main concerns has been to protect itself against summary overthrow. No régime thus concerned with its own survival is likely to govern well or to relax the methods by which it retains control. In this the present régime is probably no worse or better than some of its predecessors, and the fact remains that by one means or another it has maintained itself in power for some 18 months and is showing signs of finding time to tackle some of the country's more pressing problems. The economy is in better shape than it was, and by Iraqi standards the Government is giving proof of some stability, but it has yet to secure the support of other political groups, and requires to show a much greater measure of toleration in a country which, apart from other party differences, contains sizeable minorities in the Kurds, the Shi'is and the Christians, and to compromise to a far greater extent than it has shown itself ready to do, before it can claim to have any real degree of general support.

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Middle East Section,

Research Department,

Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

ANNEX A

THE REGIONAL COMMAND COUNCIL IN IRAQ

Ahmed Hassan al Bakr, President and Prime Minister.

Saddam Hussein al Takriti, Vice-Chairman of RCC.

Saleh Mehdi Ammash, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior.

Abdel Kerim Abdel Sattar al Sheikhli, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Abdullah Sallum al Samarraï, Minister of Culture and Information.

Izzat Mustapha, Minister of Health.

Salah Omar Ali.

Abdel Khaliq al Samarraï.

Murtadha al Hadithi.

Izzat al Duri.

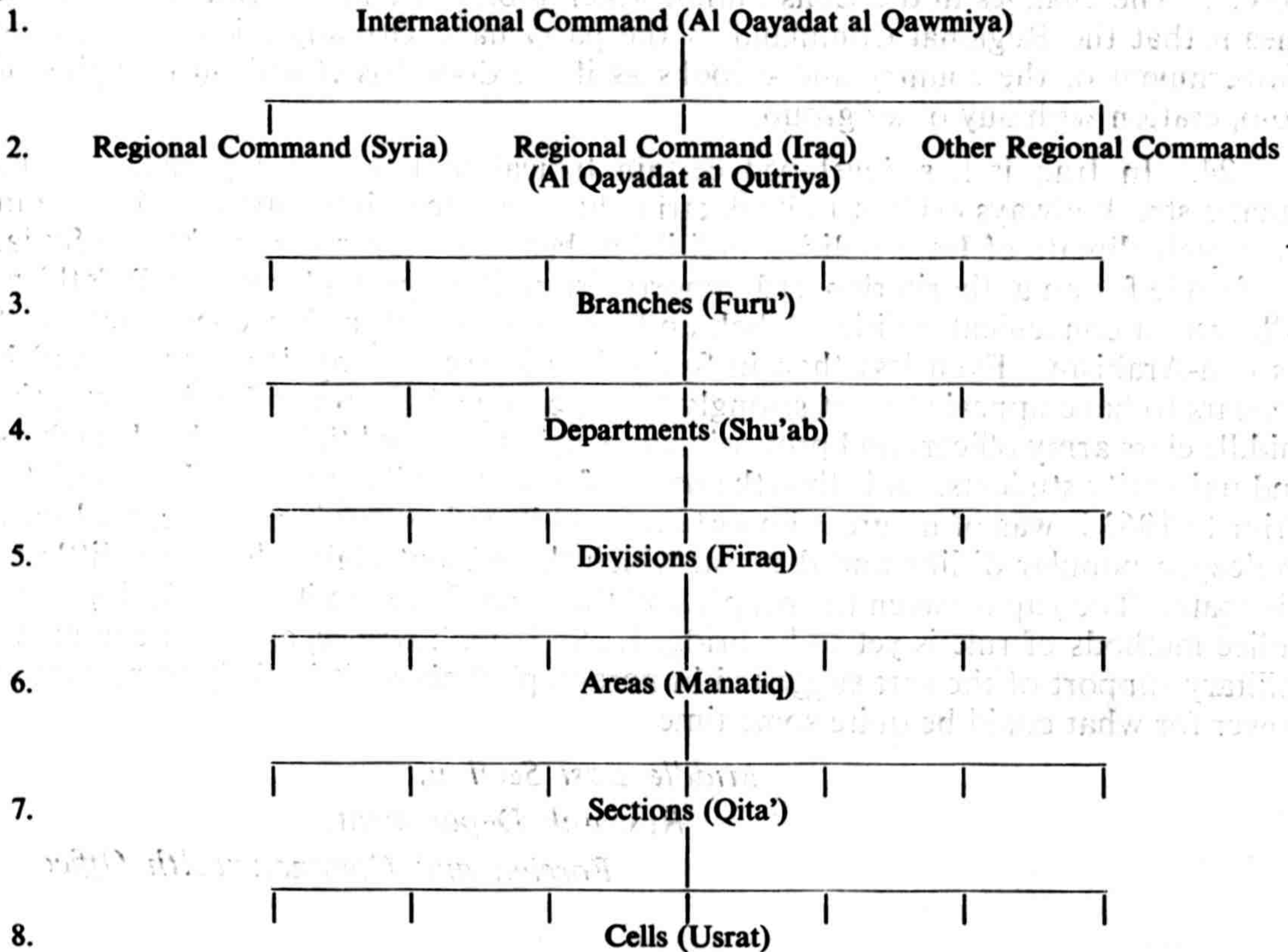
Samir Abdel Aziz al Najim.

Naim Haddad.

Taha Jizrawi.

ANNEX B

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BA'ATH PARTY



1. Elected by International Congress of the party.
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3. Secretaries of Departments and party nominees.
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5. 3-6 Area members.
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RESEARCH DEPARTMENT,
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE.

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~~THE IRAQI BA'ATH (JULY '68 - JAN '70)~~

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To:—

RR 6/5
5 February 1970

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.....In Confidence

RESEARCH DEPARTMENT MEMORANDUMThe Iraqi Ba'ath (July 1968 - January 1970)Summary

- 36^{12/15}
- A. ☐ The memorandum aims at presenting a picture of the Ba'ath régime which has been in power in Iraq since July, 1968. (Paragraphs 1 and 2.)
- B. ☐ The previous Ba'ath régime, that of 1963, had never commanded much support in the country, and fell largely because of its own internal divisions. It was one of the most unpopular régimes ever to have governed in Iraq. (Paragraphs 3-5.)
- C. ☐ There were two successful coups in Baghdad in July, 1968: the first engineered by a coalition of right-wing Ba'athists and a group of Army officers known as "The Palace Group"; the second by the Ba'ath against their erstwhile collaborators. Both were bloodless, and in both the attitude of the Republican Guard and of the Baghdad garrison were of decisive importance. (Paragraphs 6-9.)

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D. On coming to power the Regional Command outlined a political programme which followed predictable lines, but which was concerned initially with the ways and means of keeping itself in power. Latterly, with ¹⁸eighteen months of control behind it, it has begun to show signs of attempting to practice what it preached. (Paragraphs 10-16)

E. It has been least successful in its attempts to broaden the basis of its rule by creation of a National Front which would include other political groups, and it has all along adopted methods of calculated severity as a means of suppressing opposition. Its rule is that of a minority clique whose internal cohesion is by no means certain. (Paragraphs 17-21.)

F. The Government appears to be one of few strengths, but to be conducted by determined and often ruthless men who have no intention of sharing power with anyone else. So far they have been successful in consolidating their hold on the country, and so long as they can retain control of the armed forces a counter-coup seems unlikely to succeed.

1) Annex A. [□] The Regional Command Council in Iraq.

2) Annex B. The Structure of the Ba'ath Party.

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CONFIDENTIALThe Iraqi Ba'ath (July 1968-January 1970)I. Introduction *bold de*

The Ba'ath Party in Iraq first came to power as the result of the coup of February 1963 in which Abdel Kerim Qasim was overthrown and assassinated, and held office for some nine months before being ousted by the man whom it had chosen as its figurehead, President Abdel Salam Aref. The Ba'ath boasted that its eclipse would be of short duration, and that it would soon return to power, but in the event it had to wait nearly five years, until July 1968.

2. It is the object of this memorandum to try and place the present régime in its proper perspective against the background of Iraqi politics, to discover in what ways it resembles or differs from its predecessor, to examine its ideology, methods and party organisation and finally, to decide whether in fact the Party has a political viability of its own, or whether it merely affords political cover for a group of opportunist and not very united army officers.

II. The Background to the Coup of July 1968. *bold*

3. Its nine months in power in 1963 showed clearly how little genuine support the Ba'ath

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was able to command in the country as a whole, and how far it was from being able to maintain the semblance of unity. For this there were a number of reasons - the peculiarities of the party organisation which placed a premium on secretiveness and élitism, its pan-Arabism as opposed to Iraqi nationalism, the strong contrast between its democratic and even liberal ideologies and its authoritarian and repressive methods of rule, its nepotism, corruption and lack of administrative ability, and its use of violence and of the National Guard for purpose of paying off old scores and of maintaining itself in power.

4. By the time it fell it had probably achieved the distinction of having been the most unpopular régime ever to have governed Iraq, and President Aref who, whatever else his weaknesses and foibles, had a remarkable understanding of the characteristics of the men with whom he had to deal, coupled with a real flair for political intrigue, had little difficulty in getting rid of a régime which was not only detested, but had also been hopelessly weakened by its own dissensions.

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5. The Ba'ath which was ousted in the "apostasy" of November, 1963⁽¹⁾ was no longer a united party, and the split which first appeared during its months in power was deepened even further during the period of "negative militancy" covering the years between 1964 and 1968. By the beginning of 1967 it was possible to distinguish two separate Ba'ath groups in Iraq - the right-wing Ba'ath, composed mainly of those who had led the Party in 1963 and which was still associated with the International Command, led by Michel Aflaq, thus enabling them to entitle themselves the Regional Ba'ath (Al Hizb al Ba'ath fi Qutr al Iraq) and a left-wing group, Marxist in ideology (Al Ba'ath al Yasiri) and aligned with the neo-Ba'athists who had overthrown Hafiz al Amin in Syria. There was also a much smaller, extremist group, of which the leading personality was Ali Saleh al Sa'adi, Deputy Prime Minister in the 1963 government, whose methods as controller of the National Guard in 1963 had contributed greatly to the fall of the régime.

(1) Two such "apostasies" have taken their place in the canon of current right-wing Ba'ath political jargon - that of 18 November, 1963, resulting in the fall and disintegration of the Party in Iraq, and that of 23 February, 1966, in which Hafiz al Amin's régime in Syria was overthrown in the coup led by Saleh al Jedid.

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It was the first of these, the right-wing Ba'ath, which participated in the coup of 17 July, 1968, and then itself carried out the further coup of 30 July; and while it has some claim to be regarded as representative of orthodox Ba'athism, it is noticeable that, as happened with previous Ba'ath régimes, both in Iraq and Syria, the expediencies of the exercise of power have tended to make nonsense of party doctrine. There are, however, signs that with the exercise of power, and the increasing confidence thus generated, the Government is making genuinely determined efforts to carry out the programme devised during the latter months of 1968.

III. The Coups of July, 1968 *bold to*

6. On 17 July, 1968, a number of officers known as the "Palace Group", allegedly also members of the Arab Revolutionary Movement, in conjunction with a number of right-wing Ba'athists carried out a bloodless coup which resulted in the deposition and exile of President Abdel Rahman Aref. The part played by the officers was underlined by the appointment of one of their number, Colonel Abdel Razzag Nayef (Director of Military Intelligence) as Prime Minister, and of another,

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/ Lt.-Colonel Ibrahim Abdel Rahman Daud (O.C./ Republican Guard Brigade) as Minister of Defence. The Presidency went to a veteran Ba'athist, General Ahmed Hassan al Bakr, who had been Prime Minister in 1963, and the Ministry of the Interior to another, General Saleh Mehdi Ammash. The key posts in the Government were thus allotted to the planners of the 17 July coup, the remainder being given in the main to professionals who were experts in their respective spheres, Salih Kubba at the Ministry of Finance, Nasr al Hani at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Mahdi Hantoush at the Ministry of Oil.

7. The new Government was thus a coalition between right-wing Ba'athists who were conservative in outlook and who tended also to be anti-Egyptian, anti-Communist and prepared, in the main, to follow fairly middle of the road policies, and the "Palace Group", most of them younger men with more revolutionary ideas, who would have liked to establish their rule on as broad (and so not exclusively Ba'athist) a basis as possible, and who were opposed to a party monopoly.

8. In such a coalition it was only a matter of time before one of the groups moved against the other. The Ba'athists were the more

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experienced and better prepared, and less than a fortnight after the coup the inhabitants of Baghdad were made aware, by the presence in the streets of the tanks of the 10 Armoured Brigade, that a new upheaval was taking place. The Prime Minister meanwhile had been invited to the Presidential Palace, and was there arrested and flown out immediately to Morocco. The Minister of Defence, who was visiting Iraqi units in Jordan, was similarly arrested and deported to Rome. It is believed that the driving force behind the new coup was that very experienced intriguer Saleh Mehdi Ammash, assisted by Abdel Kerim Abdel Sattar al Sheikhli, who became Minister of Foreign Affairs in the new Government. The coup, however, owed much of its success to the defection of the Commander of the Republican Guard who deserted his friends in the "Palace Group" and went over to the Ba'ath.

9. Both coups demonstrated very clearly the present importance of the Guard and, to a lesser extent, of the Baghdad garrison, in the making and unmaking of Governments. The former had been greatly expanded, pampered, and heavily armed by Abdel Salam Aref, and it

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was his successor's refusal to follow the advice of the "Palace Group" which precipitated the coup of 17 July. Again, in the coup of 30 July, it was the attitude of the Guard, or rather of its Commander, which appears to have been decisive, and it would seem that as long as the Government can be certain of the loyalty of the Guard and of the garrison of Baghdad it can be fairly confident of remaining in power, ~~and~~ particularly as long as its system of ^{filtration} ~~penetration~~ at all levels in the Armed Forces continues to be effective.

IV. The Ba'ath Administration ^{bold to}
 (July 1968 - January 1970)

10. The Ba'ath, a pan-Arab party with a supra-national organisation, has nevertheless built up an elaborate structure on a cell system (see Annex B) typical of a clandestine minority group, which it has indeed been for much of its existence. As a result it has evolved as an isolated, doctrinaire elite with little popular standing, and when it has come to power it has displaced the weaknesses of its development in its lack of the common touch and of the essentials of administrative efficiency. Recently, with greater confidence and sense of stability, there have been signs that much of this weakness is on the way to being overcome.

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11. As far as policy is concerned the Party is committed nominally to following the dictates of the International Command, but in fact the Regional Commands have a good deal of autonomy, and both in Syria, and even more so in Iraq, have followed independent policies imposed by local conditions, and dictated by personal ambitions. Moreover, by the time the Iraqi Ba'ath returned to power in July 1968 the old International Command had ceased to exist, though that part of it which remained loyal to Michel Aflaq still commanded some respect in Iraq. The régime itself is representative of one wing only of Iraqi Ba'athism, although undoubtedly the much most powerful, reinforced as it has been by opportunist defections which have left the left-wing Ba'ath weaker than ever.

12. The framing and direction of policy is in the hands of the Regional Command Council, a body of 13 Ba'athists, only 5 of whom hold office in the Government (see Annex A). The programme which it sketched out for itself was to some extent concerned with consolidation of its own internal position. The usual tribute was paid to pan-Arabism and the need to co-operate with other Arab countries, the UAR in particular, but the main emphasis was laid on

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the need to allot key posts in the Armed Forces, Police, Intelligence and Civil Service to loyal Party members. All services were to be purged of their non-Ba'ath elements and steps taken to indoctrinate sympathetic and malleable material. Further emphasis was laid on the dominant rôle of the Command Council, ~~not more than a third of whom may hold Government posts~~ security in particular being kept under its direct control.

13. As regards relations with other Parties efforts were to be made to secure the co-operation of the Nasserists, Nationalists and certain Communist groups, with a view to forming a National Front and broadening the basis of its support. From any such Front, however, such religio-political movements as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Front were to be excluded, and every effort was to be made to undermine and destroy rival Ba'ath groups. Finally, a "positive attitude" was to be adopted towards imperialist-inspired plots against the régime. One mistake which was not repeated was that of openly re-establishing the National Guard, the excesses of which had contributed so much to the unpopularity of the 1963 régime. Propaganda

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was to be used with discretion and Party members were to be given suitable posts where they might make their political influence felt, but emphasis was laid on the need to avoid alarming the people.

14. In foreign policy the programme followed predictable lines, support, as noted above, for pan-Arabism, restricted however, to "progressive" countries only, military action against Israel and support for guerilla organisations, strengthening of relations with Communist countries, continuance of the struggle against "western imperialism", "Zionism" and "reaction", and the promotion and consolidation of Arab interests in the Persian Gulf.

15. At home the régime pledged itself to bring the oil companies under national control, to settle the Kurdish problem, to expedite agrarian reform and to expand irrigation, in all of which both at home and abroad, the Iraqi Command followed fairly closely time-honoured party doctrines of social reform, secularism, anti-Zionism and anti-imperialism and promotion of Arab unity with, however, a greater slant to the left than might have been expected. The régime prides itself on being in "the Vanguard of progressive Arab

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forces" and as such tends to follow extreme socialist policies.

16. It is to be remembered also that many in the régime are Ba'athists for opportunist reasons only. They are preponderantly Sunnis from central Iraq who have little political sensibility, ^{ONLY} ~~and~~ a vague idea of how to achieve their aims, and little interest in maintaining such links as still exist with the rump of the International Command, which moved its headquarters from Beirut to Baghdad shortly after the coup of 17 July. Although opposed in theory to military autocracy, they are many of them ex-officers who have had to rely on the ~~Army~~ both to bring them to power and to keep them there. To a great extent, therefore, they have to adapt their policies to the views of the senior officers among their supporters, and as suggested in paragraph 9 above, the attitude of the Republican Guard and of the Baghdad garrison is all-important.

The Régime in Action *bold*

17. Despite a number of attempts to create a National Front and so improve its popular image the régime so far has had little success, largely because of its own lack of enthusiasm for genuine cooperation with any other group, and to the one-sidedness of the terms offered. The main stumbling block to agreement with the

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Communists is the refusal of the Ba'ath to agree to the reinstatement of numbers of Communist officers in the ~~Armed Forces~~, nor have the Communists forgotten their persecution at the hands of the National Guard in 1963.

Efforts to bring in some of the smaller and less important groups such as the Arab Socialist Movement or the Socialist Unity Party, have not been any more successful, largely because once again, though to a lesser extent than in 1963, the Ba'ath has shown itself reluctant to make concessions.

18. It appears also to have had no great success in winning support in the ~~Armed Forces~~, especially in those units on active service in Jordan and in the north, mainly because of the severity of its anti-Ba'athist purges, and promotion of junior pro-Ba'athists over the heads of senior and more competent officers. So far however it has been successful in countering the development of opposition. It has destroyed even further the efficiency of the Civil Service by placing Ba'athists in many posts of importance regardless of qualifications, and has settled, rather more discreetly than in the past, a number of old scores by indiscriminate arrest and confinement of Nasserists,

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Communists, left-wing Ba'athists and Islamic Front sympathisers, and which in one case at least does not appear to have stopped short of political murder.

19. The early months in power were devoted mainly to the consolidation of its position by methods the calculated severity of which may have produced the results expected of them but which in the long run must have added much to the unpopularity of the régime. It also showed intolerance and inability to compromise in its treatment of minorities and foreign, mainly western, interests (the expulsion of the European staff of the Jesuit Hikma University is only one case in point); it has lived up to the Shi'i apprehensions that no concessions were to be expected from a Sunni, doctrinaire and militarily-dominated régime, and its efforts to deal with the Kurdish problem have not been successful. In domestic affairs it has achieved rather more but, as remarked above, the efficiency of the Civil Service has been depreciated further by the appointment of party members to posts for which they have no qualifications.

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20. In foreign affairs the Party has veered to the left with its financial and aid agreements with the Soviet bloc, ⁽³⁾ its harassment of the oil companies, its recognition of East Germany and its persecution of former political leaders on charges of collaboration with imperialism. It favours an all-out military assault on Israel under a Unified Arab Command, but is on bad, or at the best hardly cordial, terms with the other States involved, the UAR, Jordan and Syria. The Party would like, however, to play a greater part in Arab affairs than it does now, and there are signs that it is attempting to build up its influence through party members in its embassies in Kuwait, the Sudan, Syria and some other Arab countries, particularly in the Persian Gulf States, where it sees itself as the champion of Arabism against the ambitions and encroachments of Iran. While only moderately interested in the Persian Gulf the régime on the whole supports the creation of the Union of Arab Emirates, ^{though} ~~it would be~~ unlikely to tolerate for long the existence of the "feudal reactionary" Sheikhdoms which would compose it.

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Recent examples are the sulphur deal with Poland, the agreement between INOC and Machinexport (USSR) for supply of oil equipment and technical help; the loan of \$70 million from the USSR for development of the North Rumeila oilfield, and the \$84 million credit from East Germany for industrial projects.

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21. Not only is the Ba'ath an unpopular minority régime, it is also a most divided one. Internal rivalry appears to centre round the two Deputy Prime Ministers, General Saleh Mehdi Ammash, who is also Minister of the Interior, and General Hardan Abdel Ghaffar al Takriti, the Minister of Defence. They are both of them old hands at political intrigue, but whereas Ammash favours rapprochement with the Syrian Ba'ath and extreme measures, both against "reaction" abroad and opposition at home, and is supported by the left-wing and more extreme members of the Party such as Abdel Kerim Abdel Sattar al Sheikhli, Minister of Foreign Affairs, ~~Saladin Hussein al Takriti~~ and Abdullah Sallum al Samarraï, Minister of Culture and National Guidance, Takriti, a highly skilled and opportunist tactician, with the bulk of the Ba'athist officers in the ~~Armed Forces~~ behind him, and the support of the President, is inclined, for his own purposes, to follow less radical and more traditional Ba'ath policies. So far the two men have been evenly matched, but Takriti, despite support in the ~~Army~~, is mistrusted on account of the part he is alleged to have played in the fall of the régime in 1963, and it is noteworthy that he is not a member of

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the Regional Command Council. Recently, however, Saddam Hussein al Takriti has improved his position on appointment as V/Chairman of the Regional Command Council in which he is well placed to succeed should anything happen to the President.

V. Conclusions *bold to*

22. It must be concluded that this is a Government of few strengths and not a few weaknesses, one of whose main concerns has been to protect itself against summary ~~with~~ *overthrow*. *OVERTHROWAL* ~~drawal~~. No régime thus concerned with its own survival is likely to govern well or to relax the methods by which it retains control. In this the present régime is probably no worse or better than some of its predecessors, and the fact remains that by one means or another it has maintained itself in power for some ¹⁸ ~~eighteen~~ months and is showing signs of finding time to tackle some of the country's more pressing problems. The economy is in better *the government* shape than it was, and by Iraqi standards ~~it~~ is giving proof of some stability, but it has yet to secure the support of other political groups, and requires to show a much greater measure of toleration in a country which, apart from other party differences, contains

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sizable minorities in the Kurds, the Shi'is and the Christians, and to compromise to a far greater extent than it has shown itself ready to do, before it can claim to have any real degree of general support. ~~in the country~~

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23. As remarked above it is a highly elitist organisation which has few grass roots. Its system of recruitment and its structure set a premium on isolation and secrecy, characteristics which, however admirable and desirable they may be in opposition and under suppression, are no longer so in office. It is government by a clique of on the whole uncompromising, utterly determined and often ruthless men who have not hesitated to use violence to suppress any suspicion of opposition. Such methods, supplemented as they are by purges, cross-postings, grass root indoctrination and infiltration of the armed forces and civil service are calculated to keep potential plotters at bay and in such a state of fear, disorganisation and uncertainty as to make the successful mounting of a coup improbable. The other side of the coin is that the régime has tended to withdraw even more upon itself and to become even more inaccessible in its search for anonymity in the exercise of power. The changes in

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the constitution which took place in November 1969 have meant that the Regional Command of the Party have virtually taken over as the government of the country and it looks as if the door has closed on thoughts of cooperation with any other group.

24. In Iraq it has developed certain typical national characteristics. The fanatic streak always evident in its doctrine has developed into partisan violence in the tough climate of Iraqi politics, and it has become, even more so than in Syria, the facade for an authoritarian and opportunist military group for whom Ba'athism is largely a convenient political label, and whose nationalism is a contradiction of its pan-Arabism. Even less than in Syria does it rest on popular support, and it appears to have appealed most strongly to the bourgeois strata of Iraqi society, the middle class Army officers and professional men, lawyers, politicians, school teachers and university students. It is thus the party of a very small segment of Iraqi society. Prior to 1963 it was of no great importance and its behaviour in power served only to deepen popular dislike and distrust, which the present régime has done little to dissipate. The gap between the people and the Party,

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between its own ideology and police methods of rule is yet to be bridged. So long, however, as it can command military support of the sort suggested in paragraph 9 above it is likely to remain in power for what could be quite some time.

Middle East Section,
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Annex A

The Regional Command Council in Iraq *Rum code.*

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Ahmed Hassan al Bakr, President and Prime Minister.
Saddam Hussein al Takriti, V/Chairman of RCC.
Saleh Mehdi Ammash, D/Prime Minister and Minister of Interior.
Abdel Kerim Abdel Sattar al Sheikhli, Minister of Foreign Affairs.
Abdullah Sallum al Samarraï, Minister of Culture and Information.
Izzat Mustapha, Minister of Health.
Salah Omar Ali
Abdel Khaliq al Samarraï
Murtadha al Hadithi
Izzat al Duri
Samir Abdel Aziz al Najim
Naim Haddad
Taha Jizrawi

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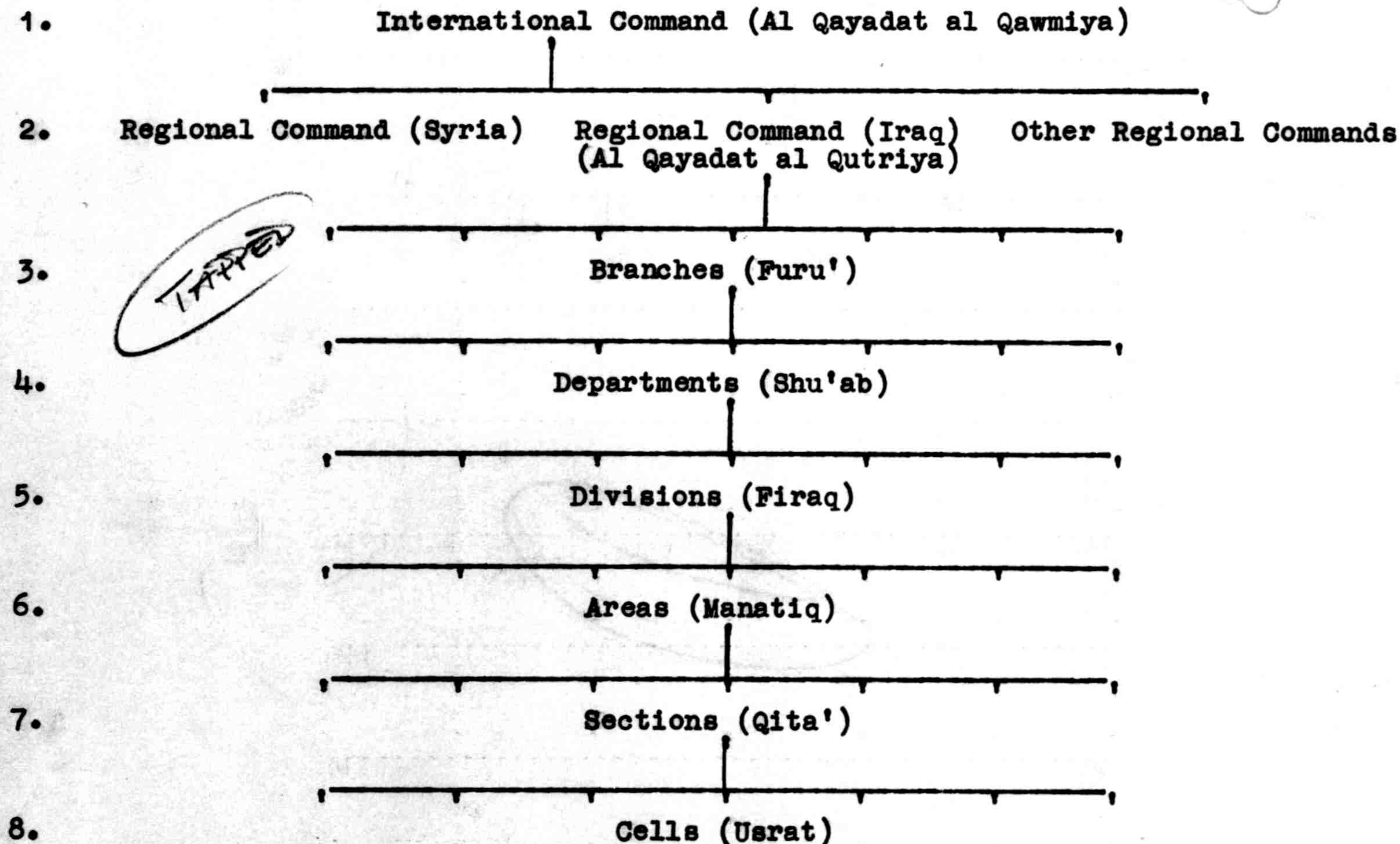
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Annex B

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The Structure of the Ba'ath Party *Resume*



1. Elected by International Congress of the Party.
2. Elected by Regional Congresses.
3. Secretaries of Departments and Party nominees.
4. Selected members of Divisions.
5. 3 - 6 Area members.
6. Selected Section leaders.
7. Cell leaders.
8. 3 - 5 members.

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Memorandum, 'The Iraqi Ba'ath (July 1968-January 1970)'; Structure Of Party; Regional Command Council. The Regional Command Of The Iraqi Ba'ath: Reports. 5 Feb. 1970. MS Middle East Online: Iraq, 1914-1974: Selected files from series AIR, CAB, CO, FCO, FO, PREM, T, WO, The National Archives, Kew, UK FCO 51/139. The National Archives (Kew, United Kingdom). Archives Unbound, link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5107460167/GDSC?u=webdemo&sid=bookmark-GDSC&xid=0b1fd849&pg=1. Accessed 11 Apr. 2022.